Chapter 6
Blending a Linguistics Course for Enhanced Student Learning Experiences in a Hong Kong Higher Education Institution

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Abstract In this chapter, a case study of implementing blended learning in a linguistics course will be reported. Traditionally, this course was taught in the mode of a 1-hour face-to-face plenary lecture plus a 2-hour small group tutorial session each week for 13 weeks. To promote blended learning and give students an enhanced learning experience that allows more flexibility and more peer interaction, two of the plenary lectures were converted into online lessons, and Moodle was used as the online platform for hosting the online content. Three levels of online activities were designed and provided online: every online lesson consisted of 3–4 mass open online course (MOOC)-style high-quality lecture video clips (Level 1, resource-based activities) followed by online quizzes (Level 2, response-based activities) and discussion forums (Level 3, collaborative activities). Post-lesson analysis shows that over 320 threads were posted by students on the Moodle forums, suggesting that students were actively engaged in online discussions. A post-lesson survey was conducted after the first online lesson, and the feedback was very positive. The majority enjoyed the flexibility of the online lesson and felt more independent during the learning process. They found the video lectures attractive and effective and the online discussion engaging and beneficial. Other than the online lessons, other resources and activities such as stand-alone course-specific website, weekly online quizzes, and Wikibook projects have been adopted to further promote blended learning. To ensure a fulfilling learning experience, instructional design plays a crucial part, especially in arranging the online lessons and other blended learning experiences. Clear and detailed instructions and guidance were also vital for the success of blended learning.

Keywords Blended learning · Linguistics course · Higher education · Hong Kong

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6.1 Introduction

As blended learning is gaining increasing popularity in higher education, it is predicted to become the 'new norm' in course delivery (Norberg, Dziuban, & Moskal, 2011, p. 207). There are many different definitions of blended learning, and Graham (2013, p. 335) summarizes that a broader definition, i.e. 'learning experiences that combine face-to-face and online instruction', may be a better choice than some of the narrower definitions (such as the definition that includes the reduction in face-to-face contact or seat time (Mayadas & Picciano, 2007; Picciano, 2009; Vaughan, 2007)), as the broader definition can cover all forms of blended learning.

Garrison and Kanuka (2004) point out that blended learning is an effective and low-risk strategy that combines face-to-face learning with online learning, and what makes it particularly effective is its ability to facilitate a community of inquiry. Communities of inquiry, no matter face to face or online, consist of three elements: cognitive, social, and teaching presence, as the sense of community and belonging must be on a cognitive and social level in order to achieve higher levels of learning. Teaching presence manages the environment in which the focused learning experiences are facilitated.

For building institutional capacity to drive, sustain, and scale up blended learning in higher education institutions (HEIs), Lim and Wang (2016, p. 4) proposed a framework, which consists of eight strategic dimensions: vision and philosophy; curriculum; professional development; learning support; infrastructure, facilities, resources, and support; policy and institutional structure; partnerships; and research and evaluation. Such a framework outlines a holistic approach to the implementation of blended learning. Figure 6.1 is a visual of the framework created by Lim and Wang (2016, p.5).

Based on this framework, starting from the 2016–2017 academic year, a project titled 'Blended Learning for University Enhancement' (BLUE) was launched in the Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK), aiming at promoting blended learning in the EdUHK courses and converting the traditional face-to-face course delivery mode into blended learning delivery mode. The slogan 'one course one online lesson' was adopted, and the university aimed at implementing blended learning stage by stage in all the traditional courses, so as to take full advantage of the benefits that blended learning would bring. The pedagogical benefits of blended learning are well established in terms of providing alternative learning space and increased use of written feedback from students and staff (Gommlich & Minick, 2007; Juwah, 2012; Kwan & Fong, 2005; Wang, 2010).

The author was one of the first selected lecturers who piloted 'one course one online lesson' in one of his traditional face-to-face courses, with the aim of promoting blended learning and giving students an enhanced learning experience that allows more flexibility and more peer interaction. The title of the course is 'Introduction to Linguistics', which is a year 1 English major course offered as a core course simultaneously in three different English major programmes, and at the same time, it is a popular free elective course for non-English major students. Every

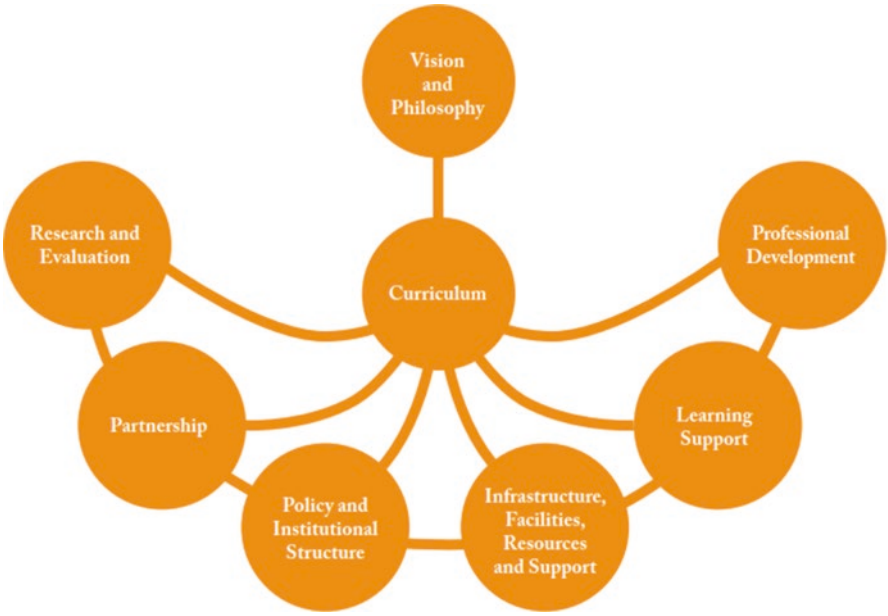

Fig. 6.1 A holistic framework for building the blended learning capacity of HEIs (Lim & Wang, 2016, p. 5)

year there are around 150 students attending the course. It is delivered in the mode of offering a 1-hour face-to-face plenary lecture plus a 2-hour small group (around 30 students per group) tutorial session each week for 13 weeks. In the 2016–2017 academic year, during the first stage of the BLUE project, the author converted the plenary lecture on 'World Englishes' into an online lesson. Due to the popularity of this first online lesson, another plenary lecture 'Pragmatics' was converted into an online lesson in the 2017–2018 academic year. After each online lesson, a face-to-face tutorial session would follow, which helped to consolidate the knowledge learned in that online lesson. Other than the online lessons, other blended learning resources/activities were introduced in the course as well, such as stand-alone course website for sharing a wide range of course materials, weekly online quizzes, and Wikibook projects to combine online peer interaction (online commenting, editing, etc.) with classroom presentation and discussion. This is in line with Garrison and Kanuka's (2004) concept of facilitating a community of inquiry through the blended learning environment.

6.2 The Online Lessons

Moodle (https://moodle.com), a popular online learning management system, was used as the online platform for hosting the online contents. According to the guidance stipulated in the BLUE project, an online lesson should include three levels of online activities: Level 1, resource-based activities (students accessing online content); Level 2, response-based activities (student interacting with online content, such as online quizzes); and Level 3, collaborative activities (students interacting with each other online). When designing the online lessons, the author made sure that all the three levels of activities are included and carefully organized.

6.2.1 Three Levels of Activities Included in the Online Lesson

6.2.1.1 Level 1 Activities: Resource-Based Activities

Every online lesson consisted of 3–4 MOOC-style high-quality lecture video clips. These are regarded as Level 1 activities: resource-based activities. In fact, before piloting the online lessons in this course, the author co-led a mass open online course (MOOC) project with a colleague and developed a MOOC titled 'The English you didn't learn in school'. Five academic staff contributed to the MOOC, and the author was responsible for two of the seven topics covered in the MOOC, which are two of the topics introduced in the course 'Introduction to Linguistics' as well. With sufficient funding support, the author was able to employ a skilled project officer to shoot the videos in a studio using advanced video shooting equipment. Originally, the author used many YouTube video clips to demonstrate different linguistic points in his traditional lectures in the past. Because of copyright issues, instead of including YouTube content, the author role-played many scenes to create original content and tried to make the lecture video clips as lively and attractive as possible. Advanced video editing software was used for post-production, and real-life backgrounds, images, animations, and texts were added to the recorded video scenes to create a vivid learning experience for the students. After a lot of effort, a series of high-quality MOOC-style lecture video clips were produced, which were then adopted in the course 'Introduction to Linguistics'. Figures 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 show how the lecture video clips were shot, edited, and then posted on Moodle.

6.2.1.2 Level 2 Activities: Response-Based Activities

For Level 2 activities, response-based activities, the author designed a set of quiz questions for each video clip, so as to check students' comprehension of the video lecture content, as shown in Fig. 6.3. Also, to make sure that students have actually watched the Segment 1 lecture video clip before moving on to watch the Segment 2

Fig. 6.2 Studio for shooting the lecture video clips

Fig. 6.3 Role play in a lecture video clip

Fig. 6.4 A lecture video clip shown on Moodle

lecture video clip, parameters were set in Moodle so that students must answer at least 50% of the quiz questions correctly in Segment 1 before they can progress to Segment 2. They are allowed to re-take the quiz for several times until they meet the completion requirement (getting 50% correct). Students must watch the lecture video clips and complete the quiz questions in all the four segments to be considered as having completed the online lesson. One course grade out of 100 will be deducted if a student fails to complete all the required online lesson activities. This is to motivate students to complete the online lesson properly, as from past experiences, if no grade is given for completing the online activities, it is likely that a number of students will not complete these online tasks. Figure 6.5 shows how the segments are sequenced on Moodle and how students are required to complete them one by one. When students click on 'Segment 1 – video lecture', the lecture video clip and a set of quiz questions will be shown on the same page.

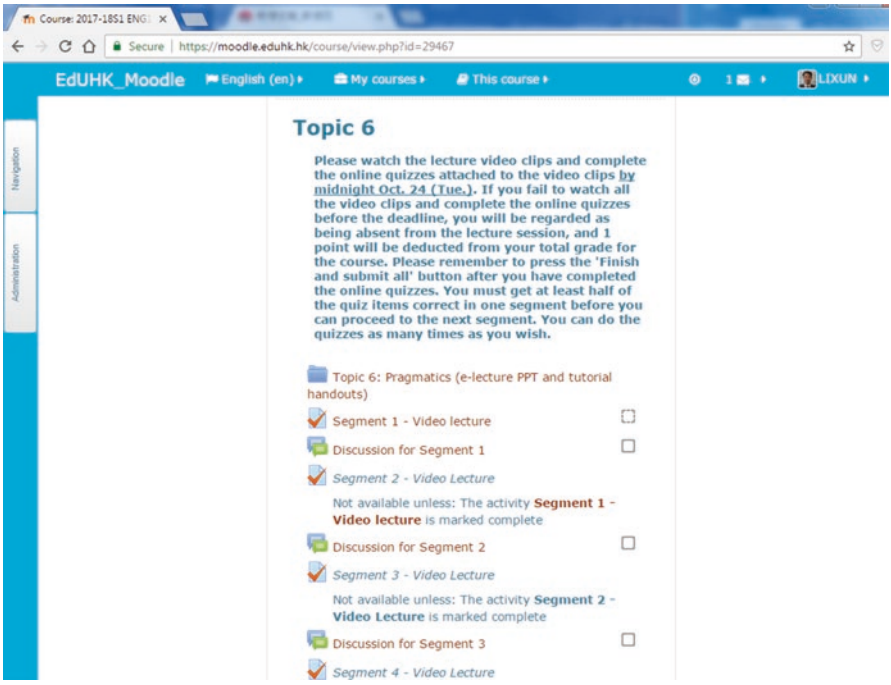

Fig. 6.5 Sequencing of segments on Moodle for students' completion

6.2.1.3 Level 3 Activities: Collaborative Activities

Other than requiring students to watch the lecture video clips and complete the attached quiz questions, a discussion forum is created for each segment, so that students can discuss interesting points introduced in the lecture video clips among themselves and with the teacher. This is Level 3 activities: collaborative activities. Figure 6.6 shows a series of messages posted by students on a discussion forum.

Having created these online forums for each segment, the author was uncertain if the students would make good use of them, as from past experiences, Hong Kong students tend not to post a lot of messages on online discussion forums in a course, especially when it is not compulsory.

To the author's surprise, post-lesson analysis shows that over 320 threads in total were posted by students on the Moodle forums for the two online lessons, and the majority of the students participated in the online discussion, suggesting that students were actively engaged in discussing topics of interests through these online forums. In a way, the lecture video clips were proved to be thought-provoking, as students had heated debates on some of the topics covered in the lecture video clips. The teacher played an important role as well, as some stimulating questions were posted on the discussion forums to arouse students' interests and encourage them to

Fig. 6.6 A series of messages posted by students on an online discussion forum

discuss. For example, in the online lesson 'Pragmatics', the author posted the following guiding question on the discussion forum:

> In daily life, we often hear people say strange things such as 'Are you the roast beef or chicken curry?' Can you post a few strange sentences that you heard from somewhere? Please explain the pragmatic meaning of the sentence(s), i.e., the speaker intended meaning.

Students were very interested in this topic and shared their own life experiences, for example:

> Student A wrote, 'It is very common to hear other people say 'what can I do for you?' in our daily life. But this common question may have different pragmatic meaning in different places. Now let me talk about one situation I have met before. Once I was traveling in another English speaking country. I visited a Library there. When I suddenly entered a place by accident where it did not allow visitors to go in, a guard came up to me and asked "what can I do for you?" Here, of course, the question doesn't mean "what would you like to eat?" It means that you cannot enter this place and please leave. There are still a lot of different situations. The pragmatic meaning of this question might depend on the places'.
>
> Student B responded, 'True. It's interesting how we use language to mean so much more than it's supposed to. If this guard were suspicious, he may have spoken in a threatening tone, and changed the meaning further. For example, "What can I do for you?" in a threatening tone can imply, "Unless you have good reasons to be here – you should leave immediately or you will be in trouble". This is an advantage that translates into communication.

Face to face is often clearer than written text, as spoken discourse can compact more meaning into fewer words with the aid of intonation, gestures and facial expressions'.

There are many exchanges like this on the discussion forums, demonstrating that students were truly engaged with the content of the lecture video clips and were able to reflect on their learning and come up with informed analysis of real-life examples based on their understanding of linguistic concepts.

6.2.2 Post-Lesson Evaluation Survey

To find out students' views towards the online lessons, an evaluation questionnaire was designed and administered online after the completion of the first online lesson. Sixty-seven students responded to the questionnaire, and the results are shown in Fig. 6.7.

As shown in Fig. 6.7, overall students were very positive about the online lesson. Eighty-seven per cent of the students indicated that online lesson of this kind was new to them, showing that blended learning of this kind was not that common back in their high school time (these are year 1 undergraduate students who just left high school); 92% of the students enjoyed the flexibility of the online lesson, as they claimed that they could study the course content anywhere and anytime (item 2); 94% of the students felt that they had greater independence and control over their learning (item 4); 86% believed they had learnt as much as they did in a face-to-face lesson (item 3). For the Level 1 activities (resource-based activities), 88% of the students found the lecture video clips attractive (item 8) and the graphics/

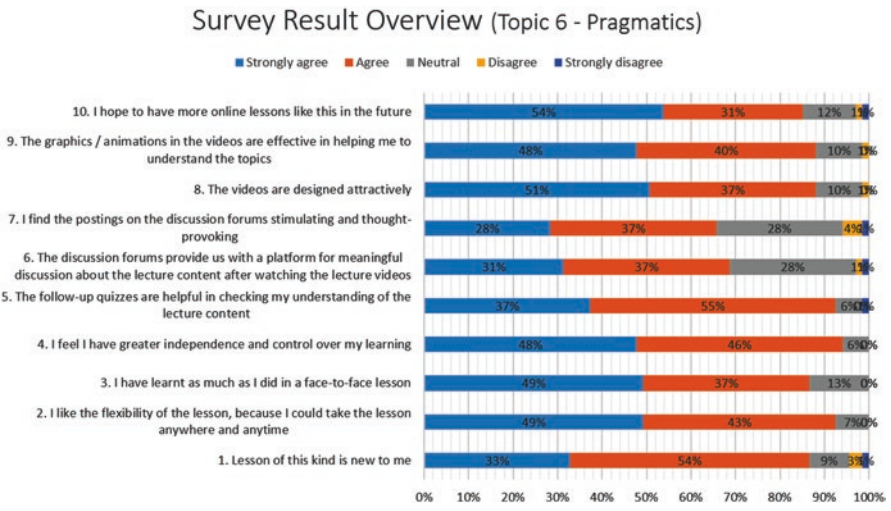

Fig. 6.7 Post-lesson evaluation survey results

animations in the video clips effective in helping them to understand the topics (item 9). For the Level 2 activities (response-based activities), i.e. the follow-up quizzes attached to the lecture video clips, 92% of the students found them helpful in checking their understanding of the lecture content. For the Level 3 activities (collaboration activities), i.e. the discussion forums, despite the high participation rate and the vast amount of messages posted, students seemed to be less positive, as 68% of the students found postings on the discussion forum meaningful (item 6) and 65% found the postings stimulating and thought-provoking. It is worth pointing out that 28% of the students gave the answer 'neutral' to these two items, so in fact very few students were truly negative about the online discussion forums. It is likely that the ones who held a neutral view were the ones who did not actively participate in the online discussion.

At the end of the questionnaire, an open-ended question was included to encourage students to give more specific written feedback ('If you have further comments regarding the online lesson, please put down here. Thank you!').

> Some of the written comments are extremely positive, for example: 'The online lecture is so so so great!!!!!! Hope we can have online tutorial too!' 'Perfect! From teachers to resources, all the things are very good'. 'These lectures are all very enjoyable and educational, I can always count on learning a thing or two from my linguistics classes'.

A student reported technical problems regarding the audio quality of the lecture video clip: 'This online lecture has the potential to be an excellent learning tool. I, however, would suggest ensuring that the audio quality is perfect, as it was difficult to sit through the second segment of the lecture due to its sound only playing in one speaker, making it physically painful to listen to with headphones!' Having checked the second segment of the online lecture video clip, no audio problem described by the student was found. It might be that the student's headphones were faulty. Still, this comment reminded the author the importance of assuring the audio and video quality of the lecturer video clips, as it would indeed be a painful experience to watch or listen to an unclear/faulty video lecture and students would soon lose all the interests and motivation after watching or listening to the first few minutes of such a video lecture. Also, the presentation of the content of the video lecture needs to be lively and interactive: a very formal-talking head all the way through would be very boring, so a MOOC-style video lecture is very different from the recording of a face-to-face lecture in a lecture hall. An informal-talking head should be adopted, and many elements such as changing of backgrounds; insertion of texts, images, and animations; and inclusion of role plays, interviews, daily-life scenes, etc. should be considered when creating a MOOC-style video lecture. Only high-quality and attractive video lectures can catch students' attention and sustain their interests. Also, the length of each lecture video clip should be limited: ideally each clip should be around 5–10 min long, as it will be hard for students to concentrate on a video lecture non-stop for too long. The above observations match with the research findings of Guo, Kim, and Rubin (2014). Through a large-scale empirical study, they found that shorter videos are much more engaging, that informal-talking head

videos are more engaging, and that even high-quality pre-recorded classroom lectures might not make for engaging online videos.

Although the majority of the students were very positive about the online lesson, there were a few who still preferred the traditional face-to-face mode. One student stated, 'It's easier to understand (the lecture) in parts, broken down into smaller pieces. But I would still prefer to go (to a lecture) in person where possible. It helps build a ready mindset for gaining knowledge, that is not easy if I simply sit somewhere and take out a laptop to watch a video. It's just too... meaningless. The videos do make it interesting, thank you, but I prefer in-person much more'.

On the whole, 85% of the students hoped to have more online lessons of this kind (item 10), and 12% were neutral about this, showing that adopting blended learning in traditional face-to-face courses is welcomed by the majority of the students, as long as the online lessons are carefully designed and three levels of activities are introduced to give students an enhanced learning experience that allows more flexibility and more peer interaction.

6.3 Other Resources/Activities for Blended Learning

Other than the online lessons, some other resources/activities have been included in the course as well for blended learning, such as stand-alone course-specific website, weekly online quizzes, and Wikibook projects.

As mentioned earlier, Moodle has been adopted as the learning management system by most staff in the EdUHK over the past decade. A recent survey conducted in the university shows that almost every course offered in the university has a private course account on Moodle. The private nature of the course account means that only students and teachers who are registered for that course have the access rights and within the private course account they can upload and download course materials, post announcements or other messages on discussion forums, set or submit assignments, etc. Although Moodle is a powerful and efficient learning management system and it protects students' and teachers' privacy, the private nature of the course account also means that it is not convenient for teachers to share teaching and learning resources across courses and across academic years and indeed with the general public. There are also limitations for Moodle to manage hyperlinks between and within documents. In order to solve such problems, a stand-alone course-specific website was developed for the course 'Introduction to Linguistics'.

6.3.1 Stand-Alone Course-Specific Website

Under the category of Level 1 activities (resource-based activities), stand-alone course-specific websites have been commonly adopted in blended learning (Blake, Wilson, Cetto, & Pardo-Ballester, 2008; Thatcher, 2007). For the course 'Introduction

to Linguistics', a course website (http://corpus.eduhk.hk/linguistics/linguistics.html) was developed with the following components: E-lectures, Online Readings, Multimedia Resources, Tasks, Online Quizzes, and Bibliography. The site serves as a stand-alone home for reusable course resources and is combined with the Moodle system to support course learning. Figure 6.8 shows a screenshot of the course-specific website.

Through the course-specific website, course resources can be shared easily by different teachers (or students) teaching (or studying) this same course and indeed by whoever is interested in the course content across the world. The website provides easy online access to the course materials, which is crucial for ensuring the flexibility and accessibility of the online learning environment (Anderson, 2018).

In the 'Introduction to Linguistics' course website, the Introduction section provides an overview of the course site. The E-lectures section intends to share some of the E-lectures in the course. The Multimedia Resources section offers links to a variety of online multimedia resources related to different topics covered in the course. The Online Readings section provides links to a large number of online academic articles related to the course topics, which are very useful for students' learning. The Tasks section gives details of different assessment tasks to students in the course. The Bibliography section provides a detailed bibliography for the relevant course topics. The Online Quizzes section hosts weekly online quizzes, which is an important component in the course that facilitates blended learning, and will

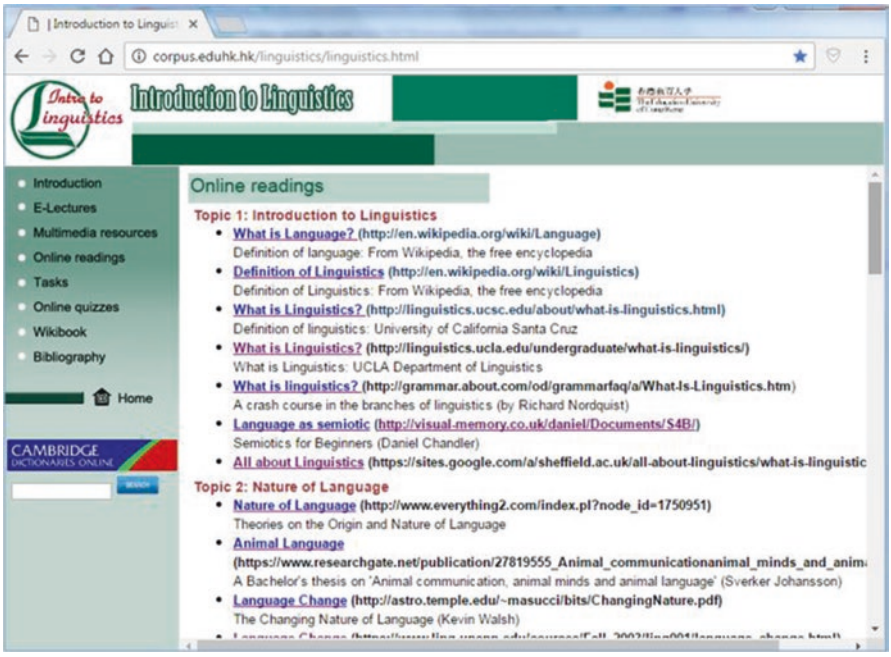

Fig. 6.8 A screenshot of the stand-alone 'Introduction to Linguistics' course site

be discussed in detail in Sect. 6.3.2. The Wikibook section introduces the Wikibook projects, a major innovation in the course that promotes blended learning, which will be discussed separately in detail in Sect. 6.3.3.

6.3.2 Weekly Online Quizzes: Self-Assessment for Learning

In the Online Quizzes section, originally, a self-developed quiz building program was used to provide weekly online quizzes to test students' comprehension of the course content. A programmer was employed to write the quiz program and design the online quiz interface. Although the self-developed online quiz program managed to help students to self-assess their learning, there were some technical issues (such as occasional bugs in the program) which negatively affected students' online learning experiences. In the 2016–2017 academic year, the BLUE project team provided technical support and explored the possibility of revamping the online quiz system. It was discovered that the quiz creation function in Moodle was very powerful and would allow us to create more user-friendly online quizzes and the quiz data bank and quiz grades could be stored, edited, and analysed more easily as well. As a result, around 600 quiz items (10 quizzes in total, around 60 items in the question bank for each quiz) were migrated onto the Moodle online quiz system. Figures 6.9

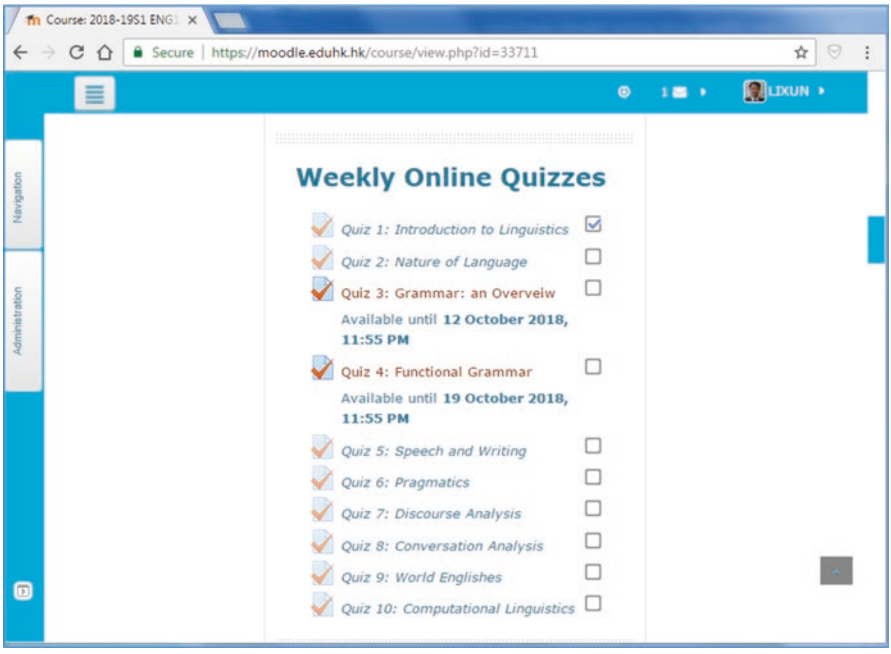

Fig. 6.9 Screenshot of the Online Quizzes page on Moodle

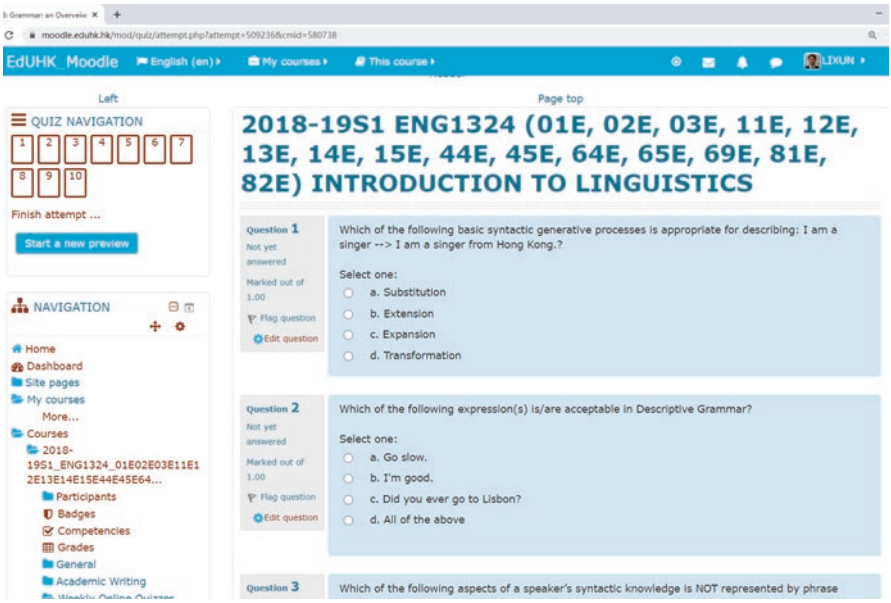

Fig. 6.10 Screenshot of the online quiz interface on Moodle

and 6.10 show screenshots of the online quiz system on Moodle. These Moodle quizzes, which are under the category of Level 2 activities (response-based activities), offer students a much improved experience of self-assessing their comprehension of the course content.

A unique feature of the Moodle weekly online quiz system is that students are allowed to re-take a quiz repeatedly within a 1-week period but, every time a student restarts a quiz, 10 items are randomly selected from a question bank database of around 60 items, which means that each time the student would be doing a quiz with new questions in it (it is possible that one or two items would reappear in the new quiz). This means that students will not be able to copy each other's (or even their own) answers, as each time they are answering a different set of questions. After students submit a quiz online, they receive immediate feedback on their answers and how many points they have scored, as shown in Fig. 6.11.

All the grading and feedback provision are done automatically by the online quiz system, which means that linking assignments with online quizzes is an effective way to introduce homework into courses with large number of students, as it will not overload instructors with excessive grading (Cooper, Tyser, & Sandheinrich, 2007). Of course, designing a large number of quiz items and coming up with feedback messages for each item were very time-consuming, but these were done by a team of teachers and research assistants through the support of Teaching Development Grant projects over a period of time, and the question bank can be continuously expanded gradually over the years, and the end product is a

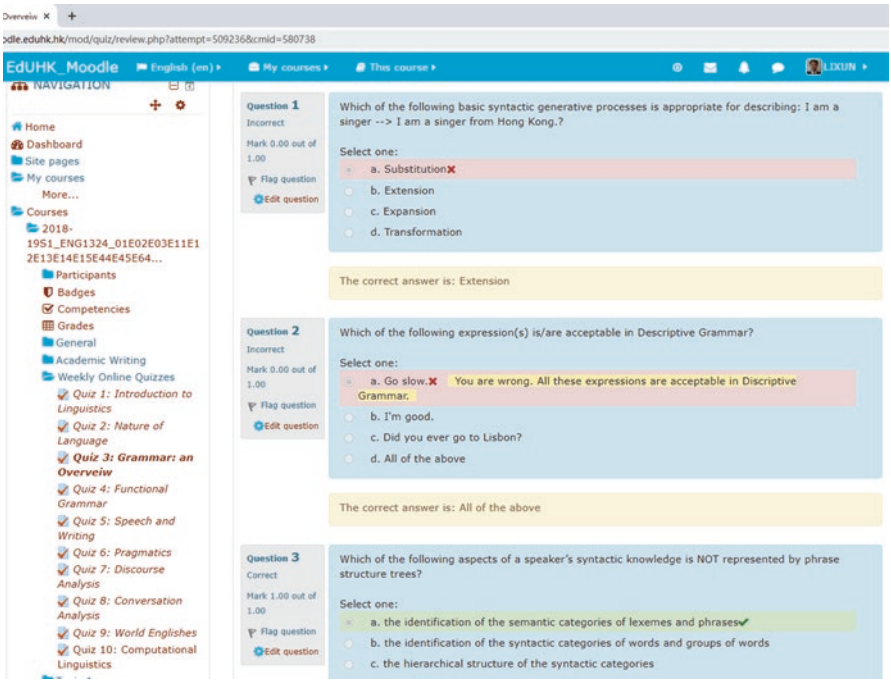

Fig. 6.11 Immediate feedback and grading after students have completed a quiz

comprehensive and effective online quiz system which can be enjoyed by a large number of students and teachers for many years to come.

A quiz is made available online after a lecture on the topic has been given to the students. Although they have gained some basic understanding of the topic, in order to be able to answer all the quiz questions, they need to study the textbook of the course and other recommended readings. Quite often, when doing the quiz, students would try to find answers in their textbook or relevant readings. Students can take the quiz repeatedly before a given deadline, and only the highest score will be formally recorded. Since the ten weekly online quizzes are part of the formal assessment of the course (10% of the overall grade), most students are willing to do the quiz as many times as necessary in order to achieve the highest possible score. The Moodle quiz system records all the attempts of the students, and past statistics show that a student is likely to take a quiz 5–8 times on average in order to obtain a high score. As shown in Fig. 6.12, this student did the quiz nine times and scored 10 out of 10 eventually.

This is a great example of self-assessment for learning (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2003; Carless, 2005), as students are constantly learning from the instant online written feedback provided to them when they repeatedly take the quiz. Student feedback suggests that they are extremely positive about this type of online assessment, as one student commented, 'The weekly online quizzes in this course were the most enjoyable and beneficial assessment task I have experienced, as I was very motivated to take the quiz repeatedly in order to obtain a high score,

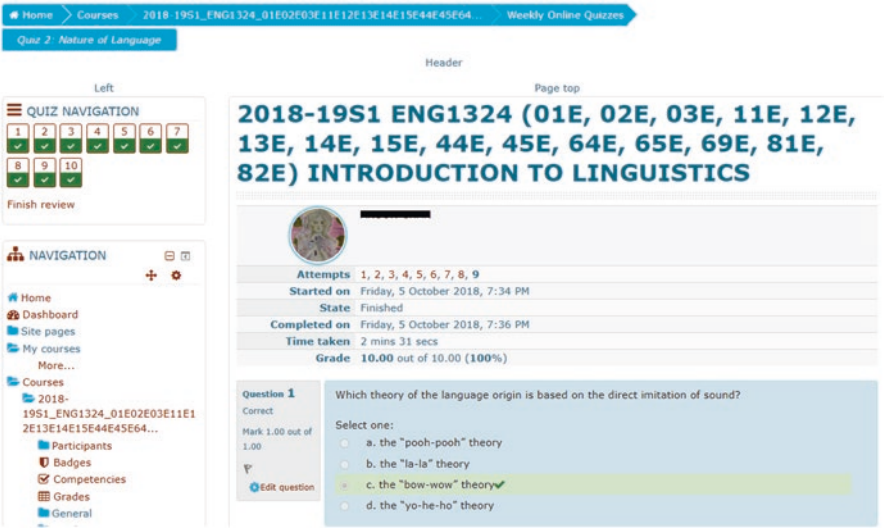

Fig. 6.12 Repeated attempts made by a student when completing an online quiz

and there was no real pressure which I would feel when taking a paper-based quiz in a formal classroom situation. Most importantly, I learned so much from the quizzes, and I was more aware of my study progress in this course'.

6.3.3 Wikibook Project: Collaborative Writing and Community of Inquiry Online

Kimmons (2018) proposed a pedagogical model called 'PICRAT' regarding effective integration of technology in educational settings. PIC stands for 'passive', 'interactive', and 'creative', which describe students' different types of relationship with technology, and RAT stands for 'replaces', 'amplifies', and 'transforms', which describe teachers' different types of use of technology. Figure 6.13 shows a visual of the PICRAT model.

Kimmons gave an example about this model: if a history teacher replaces the writing class notes on chalkboard with a PowerPoint presentation on screen, this would be categorized in the bottom-left (PR) section of the grid, as the teacher is just using the technology to replace a traditional practice. However, if an English teacher guides students to develop a creative writing blog, which they use to get feedback from their peers and the online community on their short stories, this would belong to the top-right (CT) section, as the teacher is employing the technology to transform his/her practice to conduct something that would not have been possible without relying on technology and the students are making use of the technology as a tool for creation. With reference to the PICRAT model, Wikibook projects were

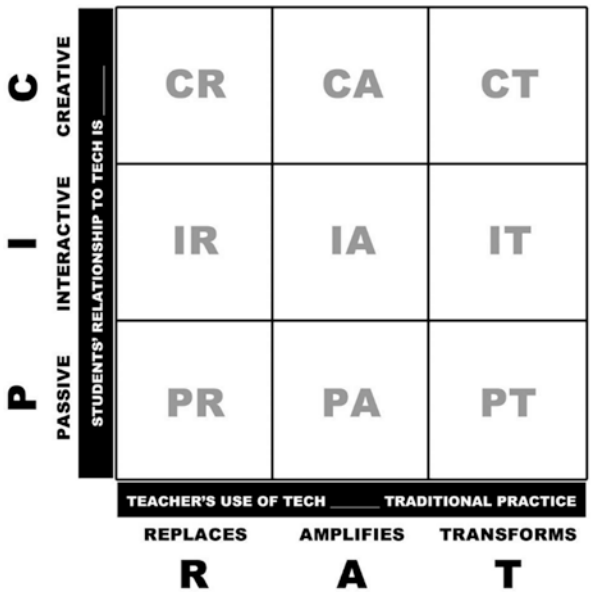

Fig. 6.13 The PICRAT model of technology integration (Kimmons, 2018)

implemented in this case study, which could be categorized in the top-right (CT) section of the model, as students are using the technology as a tool for creating a Wikibook. Details of the Wikibook project are given in the following section.

When students first enter the university, they normally face the challenge of being required to complete a lot of academic writing assignments without being very familiar with the academic writing conventions. Instead of taking exams like they did in the secondary school, they find themselves scratching their heads trying to complete academic essays on their own before a given deadline. Although they desperately need support regarding their academic writing, it is not possible for the course lecturers to spend unlimited hours commenting on every student's drafts. As a result, lecturers often receive written assignments of poor quality from students, and both sides feel frustrated about this process.

To address the above-mentioned problems, Wikibook projects have been implemented in the course 'Introduction to Linguistics' to promote academic reading and writing among first-year undergraduate students. According to Wikipedia, a wiki is 'a page or collection of Web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content, using a simplified markup language' (Wikipedia: Wiki, n.d.). In the education field, more and more scholars and educators have realized the value and potential of wiki in education (Konieczny, p. 2012).

When designing a blended mode course, assessment should be allowed to play a major role (Herron & Wright, 2006), and Wikibook projects can be adopted as a great tool for authentic assessment in an online environment. A Wikibook project requires students to undertake academic reading/study in small groups to complete the joint authoring of an academic book (Wang, 2016).

In the Wikibook project for the course 'Introduction to Linguistics', students work in groups of four, and each group member contributes around 900 words to a chapter of a student-authored academic book titled 'Introduction to Linguistics' based on the topics introduced in the course. Each chapter must also include ten multiple-choice comprehension questions based on the content of the chapter. Through designing these comprehension questions, the authors of the chapter will be able to reflect on the content of the chapter and identify the key concepts in the chapter that should be understood by the readers. Peer editing among group members is required, and members in the same group receive the same group grade (30% of the total grade). A draft of one group's Wikibook chapter must be posted on the Wikibook website online according to a prescribed schedule. One chapter draft will be posted online every week throughout the semester according to the order in which the topics are introduced in the course. It is essential for students to post the chapter draft online before the given deadlines, so as to allow the tutor and students to provide online comments within a period of time. Figure 6.14 shows a screenshot of a Wikibook 'Introduction to Linguistics'.

Wikibook is an open-content online textbook that can be edited by anyone who has been given the editing rights (Wikibooks: About, n.d.). For the Wikibook project, the Google Sites website provides free Wikibook hosting: https://sites.google.com/. Students study the course content through a mixture of face-to-face instruction and online learning, and they work collaboratively online to complete the chapters in groups. Figure 6.15 shows a screenshot of a Wikibook chapter online. In order to enable students to help each other with their academic writing, peer editing was required in the course.

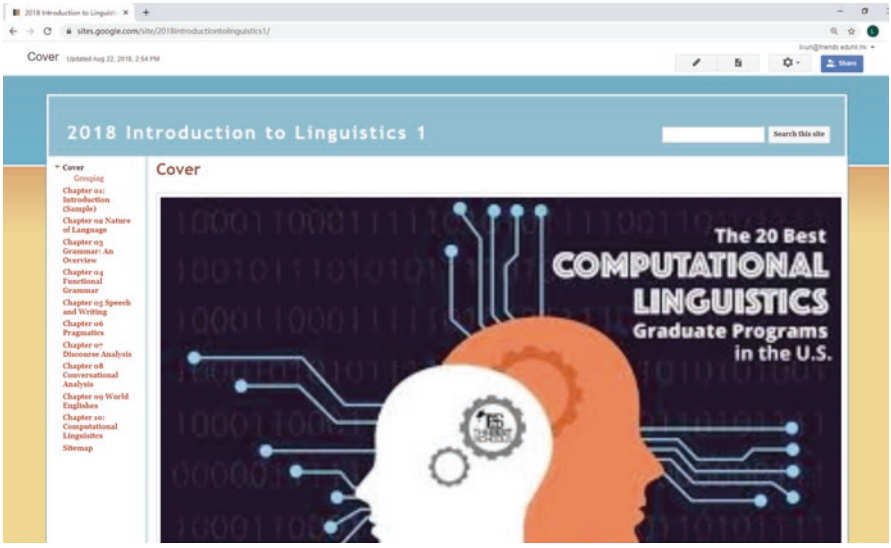

Fig. 6.14 Screenshot of a Wikibook 'Introduction to Linguistics'

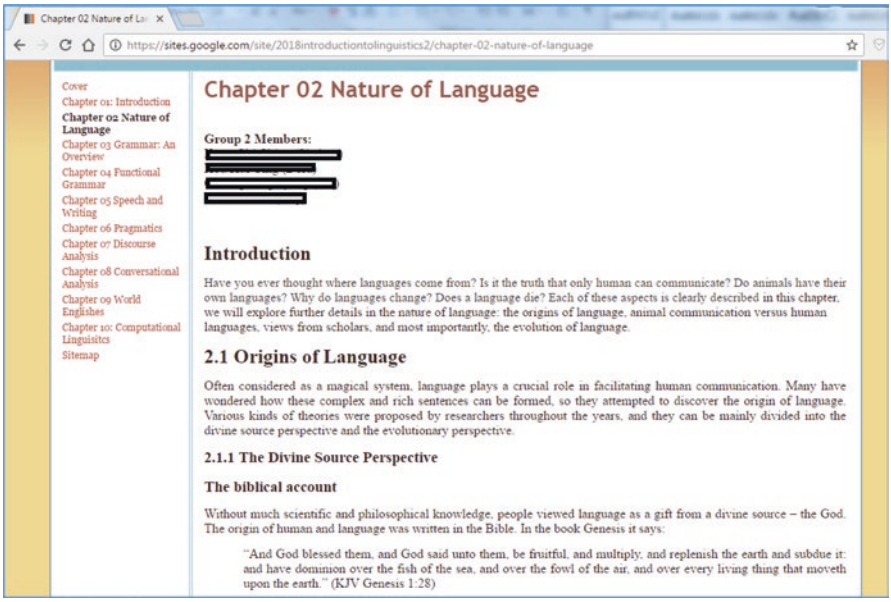

Fig. 6.15 Screenshot of a Wikibook chapter

Group members are required to peer edit each other's section in the corresponding chapter of the book so as to help ensure that each section includes sufficient detail, that the writing is polished, and that the whole chapter is coherent (the content of each section links together logically and smoothly). At the same time, other students must comment on the draft Wikibook chapter online, as shown in Fig. 6.16.

When giving online comments, students are required to include the following content: (1) what the student has learned from reading the chapter, and what she/he finds most interesting/beneficial; (2) what can be improved, or what other content/subtopics can be included in such a chapter; (3) rate the chapter on a 1–5 scale (1 = low quality; 5 = high quality). Every week, one group of students will give an oral presentation on their Wikibook chapter in front of their classmates, and the audience can take out their mobile devices and comment on the draft Wikibook chapter online while listening to the presentation or after the presentation. In the Asian context, normally students are not willing to give oral feedback to their peers' work, as they worry about saying the wrong things. However, our experience in the Wikibook project shows that students are far more willing to leave written comments online for their peers, as it is less threatening/stressful both to themselves and to their peers. As a formal assessment task, one point will be deducted each time when a student fails to provide a proper written comment on a Wikibook chapter. This is an important motivator for students to provide meaningful online comments to others, as empty general comments such as 'well done' will not help the authors of the chapter to further improve the quality of the chapter.

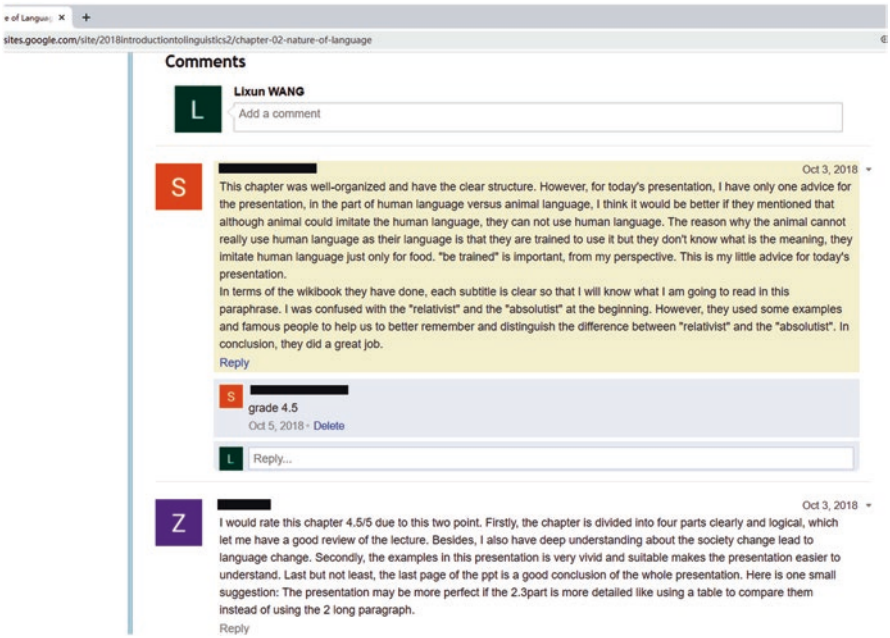

Fig. 6.16 Screenshot of students' online peer comments on a Wikibook chapter

The Wikibook project helps to create a group work scenario. Through online peer commenting and peer editing, an online community of inquiry is formed, which complements traditional face-to-face learning. It also helps to enhance the communicative and collaborative components of a blended learning environment, which is under the category of Level 3 activities (collaborative activities) mentioned earlier.

To discover the effectiveness of the Wikibook project, an end-of-course survey was carried out in one academic year, and a number of individual interviews were also conducted. The overall findings indicate that although some students found the Wikibook project quite challenging, most of them found the blended learning experience very rewarding and believed they had improved their academic reading and writing skills significantly through participation in the Wikibook project. The online community of inquiry that students built together enabled them to form a close bond with each other and learn more from each other.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the adoption of blended learning in a traditional face-to-face tertiary-level English major course. A number of observations have been made: tertiary students are ready to accept blended learning as a normal course delivery

mode, on the condition that the online lessons and other learning activities are designed carefully which would incorporate three levels of activities: resource-based activities (Level 1), response-based activities (Level 2), and collaborative activities (Level 3). This matches the theoretical underpinnings of the PICRAT model mentioned earlier, as students play different roles in the learning process (from being a passive receiver of information, to being actively interacting with the course content and with each other, to being creatively producing learning outcomes), while teachers also implement different strategies while helping students to learn through employment of technology (from merely replacing traditional practices using technology to transforming students' learning by employing technological tools to allow students to be creative in their learning). For resource-based activities, high-quality interactive lecture video clips of limited length (around 5–10 min) are crucial for the success of an online lecture; stand-alone course-specific websites serve as a stand-alone home for reusable course resources which provide great online support for course learning. Response-based activities such as online quizzes and collaborative activities such as online discussion forums and Wikibook projects are essential as well to provide students with abundant opportunities to interact with the content (via online quizzes) and among themselves (via online discussion forums and Wikibook projects). The post-lesson evaluation suggested that the majority of the students enjoyed the flexibility of the online lesson and felt more independent during the learning process. They found the video lectures attractive and effective, the online quizzes highly beneficial, the online discussion engaging and beneficial, and the Wikibook project challenging but very rewarding. To ensure a fulfilling learning experience, instructional design plays a crucial part, especially in arranging the online lessons and designing assessment tasks such as the online quizzes and Wikibook project. Clear and detailed instructions and guidance are also vital for the success of blended learning. Through this case study, it is hoped that this chapter can shed some light on how blended learning can be integrated into traditional face-to-face courses effectively.

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